

## PROPHYLAXIS OF SMALLPOX IN ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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Variolation, as an empirical method of smallpox prevention, was practiced since earliest times; it was first mentioned in a Chinese medical textbook dated 1014, but it is presumed it was in use throughout the Orient.

Arabic people were familiar with rashes as well as with the other infectious diseases. The famous physician Rhazes (850-932) described smallpox and differentiated it from varicella and measles in a paper nowadays considered as the first monograph in the medical literature.

Smallpox was also present in our country with epidemic waves occurring from time to time. In the writings of the Romanian chroniclers no devastating epidemic of smallpox similar to those recorded in Western Europe is described. It is believed that epidemics were of low intensity, and that the disease was endemic. Old Romanian literature mentions notable people who had smallpox, such as Stefan, the son of Radu Voda, Sigismund Bartori or Lucsandra, proposed by Matei Basarab.

Reputed researchers in the history of Romanian medicine, such as Valeriu Bologna and Pompei Samarian, claim that in the Romanian traditional medicine variolation and smallpox

vaccination were practiced since ancient times.

Evidence on variolation and empirical vaccination practiced by the Romanian peasants from Transylvania, Bucovina, Banat, Moldova and Muntenia, as well as by the Macedo-Romanians (Aromanians from Macedonia) come from physicians who used these techniques, and foreigners who visited Romania and described the habits of its people in various publications.

The first such mention was made by the Venetian Francisco Griselini in 1789 who in "Geschichte des Temesvarer Banats" described two techniques of inoculating pustular smallpox material from sick persons to healthy children. The first technique consisted in the placement of the pustular material directly on the arm skin previously strongly rubbed with a rugged cloth until the area became inflamed. The second technique consisted in the superficial incision of the arm skin into which a smallpox pustule was placed.

The Hungarian physician Francisc Nyulas in his book "Kolosvrari Tehenhimlo" (Vaccination in Cluj) published in 1802 described the habit of the peasants in Somes and Fagaras areas to bathe the children in the milk from cows with cowpox, milk

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previously used to wash the udder covered by cowpox lesions. After a while these children presented a mild form of disease and became resistant in case of smallpox epidemics.

Another method described by doctor Nyulas consisted in the use of a fine needle to prick cowpox pustules which then was passed through child's ear lobe.

According to the same author, in the areas around Cluj, such as Ceanul Mare and Cicud, it was the Valach priests who inoculated smallpox using a "mysterious" method known only by themselves.

In 1782, F.I. Sulzer in "Geschichte des transalpinischen Dacieas" published in Wien, mentioned that the variolation of young girls on the forehead or wrist was practiced as a measure "to preserve beauty" and was required by etiquette.

The Romanian popular name of smallpox was "vărsat" (vomiting) and that of variolation "altoire" (grafting), by similitude with the term used in gardening. The latter word comes from the Hungarian word "oltani" – identical with the French word "greffeur"- describing the procedure of grafting – that is taking a small branch from a given tree and inserting it into the bark of another tree in order to induce some qualities in the latter one.

Variolation was based on the same principle, proved by the fact that until the XIXth century the Romanian term for vaccination was "altoire"(grafting) or phonetic variations -"ultuire" or "hultuire".

Procedures of variolation and vaccination were also used in the Romanian empirical veterinary medicine. Various procedures were described, but the most common one was the inoculation by a fine needle of pustular material from a sick animal into the ear lobe of a healthy one. Evidence of such practices is the paper of a Hungarian veterinary doctor, Iosef Oeffner, who practiced this type of vaccination "as the Romanians from Transylvania did".

In the XVII-th century, two foreign physicians who practiced in the Romanian Principalities, promoted variolation in Western Europe.

Dr. Emanoil Timoni, doctor of old monarchic Ghika family, brought this procedure to the attention of his colleagues in Oxford (Great Britain) in 1678 and Padova (Italy) (6).

Dr. Iacob Pylarino, Italian of Greek descent, was brought in Romania in 1684 by Șerban Cantacuzino. He was successively doctor at the court of Constantin Brîncoveanu and Peter the Great. In 1715 he published at Venice "Nova et tutta variolas excitandi per transplantationen methodus", reprinted in 1821 at Nuremberg and Leyda.

His work was of peculiar value as it spread the method of variolation in Western Europe.

Of course, there is no coincidence in the fact that Prince Neculai Mavrocordat had variolized his children in 1713 at the same time Dr. Pylarino was concerned with this method. Acceptance by the Romanian princely court and then by noblemen proves the value of this old empirical procedure. With the use of this

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procedure by Dr. I. Pylarino a progress has been made – scientific variolation. This type of prophylaxis together with Jennerian vaccination introduced by 1798 gradually led to worldwide eradication of smallpox.

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